

Estimating Elite Family Origins with Given
Names: a study of intergenerational political
status transmissions in China

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How are Chinese leaders selected?

meritocracy? faction politics? (mysterious) princeling politics?

How to measure parental political status in China?

- ▶ Political lineage data hardly exist in China, for good reasons
- ▶ Surnames reveal political lineage in many countries, but ...
- ▶ How about given names? Parents from different social and ideological groups tend to give their babies different names.
 - ▶ “The chance of an Eleanor born 1991-95 attending Oxford was more than 100 times as great as a Jade.” (Clark *et al.* 2014)
 - ▶ There is “strong differences in birth naming practices related to ... ideology” in the US (Oliver *et al.* 2016)

Our methodological approach

- ▶ If the Chinese revolutionary elites gave babies distinctive “red names,” these names can proxy elite family status
- ▶ Compared to the literature, we demand a lot from the predictive power of a specific set of given names
- ▶ We have to be careful about the conditions under which our approach works

Hypothesis 1: Red name, as a political fashion, has a life cycle.

- ▶ totalitarian politics is famous for public display of loyalty
- ▶ It is not surprising if Chinese revolutionary elites create distinctive ideological baby names
- ▶ The tricky thing is low-class parents will copy the elite names
- ▶ Under Veblen's classic theory of fashion cycle (1899):
 - ▶ the high-class fashion trickles down the social ladder
- ▶ if this hypothesis is true, red name is a more precise proxy of family origins in the early stage of fashion cycle.

Hypothesis 2: Elite descendants have better political careers.

- ▶ Grown-ups with red names in early cohorts should do better politically.
- ▶ Following our hypothesis 1, the above effect is stronger in places with few red baby names
 - ▶ The fashion cycle is unlikely uniform across the country.
 - ▶ Some provinces, like Beijing and revolutionary-base provinces, tend to have more elite babies (and also more red baby names) than others at any time

a fundamental mismatch

- ▶ Some provinces have more elite babies
- ▶ But prospective jobs are distributed more evenly
- ▶ Does it mean that some provinces gonna have a rat race among elite descendants?
- ▶ Unlikely.

Hypothesis 3: The geographic diffusion of officials with red names.

- ▶ The provinces with high concentration of elite descendants can export some grown-up elite descendants to provinces with lower concentration.

Red Name Success Rate

	Province A		
	red name		common name
	elite	non-elite	
n in baby	1	0	99
n in official	1	0	1
success rate	100%		

	Province B		
	red name		common name
	elite	non-elite	
n in baby	3	3	94
n in official	2	0	0
success rate	1/3		

Red Name Success Rate (with migration)

	Province A		
	red name		common name
	elite	non-elite	
n in baby	1	0	99
n in official	1+1	0	1
success rate	200%		

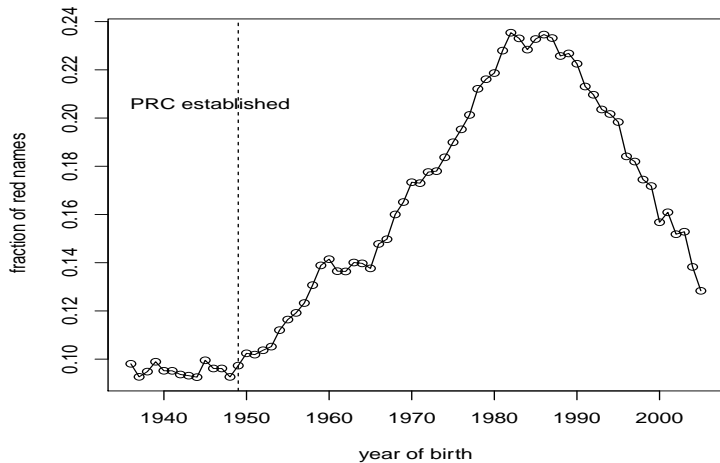
	Province B		
	red name		common name
	elite	non-elite	
n in baby	3 -1	3	94
n in official	2	0	0
success rate	50%		

Data

- ▶ 2% sample of China by-census survey 2005, with names
- ▶ Name list of Prefecture leaders (party boss and mayor, birth year 1940-1970, with birth province and job province information)
- ▶ Red names: Name list of alumni of the Army Day School in Beijing
 - ▶ this school exclusively served the Chinese communist elites before the Cultural Revolution
 - ▶ Names in our data from birth cohorts in the 1940s and early 1950s
- ▶ President Xi Jinping is on both lists.

Evidence for Hypothesis 1: Red name, as a political fashion, has a life cycle.

Red Name is a Political Fashion in Modern China



Red names are indeed ideological

Table: The 10 most popular red names from the Army Day School

Rank	Given Name	meaning
1	Xiao Ping	(little) stability/conquer
2	Jian Jun	build the army
3	Xiao Ming	(little) wise
4	Jian Hua	build China
5	Jian Ping	build stability
6	He Ping	peace
7	Xin Min	new people
8	Jian Guo	build the country
9	Ping	stability/conquer
10	Sheng Li	victory

Regression findings of red name adoption

- ▶ In the 1950s to 1970s, red names are more likely for higher political status: surnames rare in a county (proxy of outsiders), provinces closer to Beijing, provinces that were liberated early (diff-in-diff estimates), provincial capital, urban area.
- ▶ In the reform period, red names are more associated with low-class people. They are less likely to appear in provincial capitals or urban areas.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	1948-1951		Red Name Indicator 1948-1970		1990-2005	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Male	-0.045*** (0.006)	-0.044*** (0.005)	-0.021*** (0.005)	-0.020*** (0.005)	-0.025*** (0.004)	-0.022*** (0.004)
County Surname Share	-0.018 (0.020)	-0.082*** (0.023)	-0.048* (0.028)	-0.115*** (0.037)	-0.129** (0.053)	-0.158*** (0.035)
Liberated	0.010*** (0.002)	0.005*** (0.002)	0.042*** (0.005)	0.004 (0.004)		
Distance to Beijing	-25.874*** (6.011)		-25.691*** (8.310)		-36.000** (15.224)	
Province Capital	0.018*** (0.005)	0.011** (0.005)	0.022*** (0.005)	0.018*** (0.004)	-0.010 (0.009)	-0.006 (0.005)
Urban	0.042*** (0.005)	0.038*** (0.004)	0.079*** (0.008)	0.078*** (0.007)	-0.039*** (0.009)	-0.029*** (0.010)
Constant	0.138*** (0.008)		0.116*** (0.011)		0.277*** (0.018)	
Province dummines	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Birthyear/month dummines	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	112,772	112,772	905,812	905,812	555,490	555,490

Evidence for Hypothesis 2: Elite descendants have better political careers.

Political advantage at prefecture level

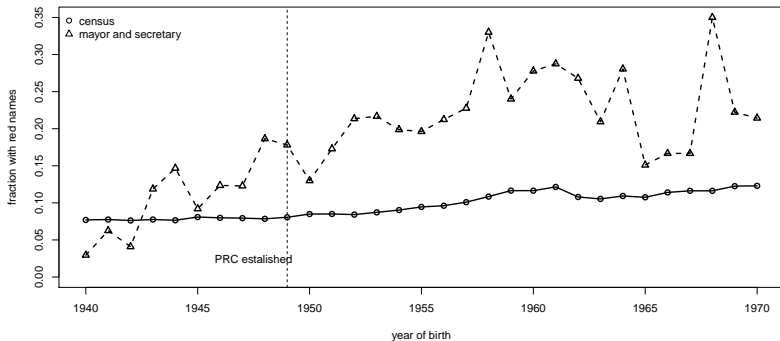


Figure: Red names are overrepresented among prefecture leaders (birth year 1940-1970)

Aggregated Evidence at Birth Cohort/Province Level

- ▶ x is the percentage of red names in the census birth cohort for a province
- ▶ y is the percentage of red names among prefecture leaders that are born in a birth cohort for a province
- ▶ We find that y does not respond to x . In other words, y is relatively big when x is small. Not surprisingly, y/x negatively responds to x .
- ▶ Over-representation of red name is more likely when red names are rare.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	<i>y</i>		<i>y/x</i>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>x</i>	0.076 (0.273)	-0.117 (0.399)	-6.537** (2.964)	-6.602** (2.701)
Constant	0.125*** (0.033)		2.031*** (0.466)	
province dummines	No	Yes	No	Yes
birthyear dummines	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	951	951	951	951
R ²	0.0002	0.149	0.018	0.152
Adjusted R ²	-0.001	0.090	0.017	0.094

Note:

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$
 birth province cluster standard errors

Evidence of Red Name Advantage at Individual Level

- ▶ At the population census sample, if a given name is red, it is significantly more likely to coincide with the given name of a prefecture leader that is born in the same province/year.
- ▶ The above advantage of red name is significantly stronger when red name is rare in the province/year cohort.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Prefecture Official Indicator			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Red Name	0.001*** (0.0002)	0.002*** (0.0002)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
Provincial Red Name Share		-0.001* (0.001)	0.0003 (0.0003)	0.0001 (0.001)
Name Frequency		-0.001*** (0.0002)	-0.0005*** (0.0001)	-0.002*** (0.0002)
Provincial Red Name Share * Red Name			-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.011*** (0.003)
Constant	0.0001*** (0.00002)	0.0003*** (0.0001)	0.0001** (0.00004)	
Province dummies	No	No	No	Yes
Birthyear dummies	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	860,330	860,330	860,330	860,330
R ²	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Adjusted R ²	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
birth province cluster standard errors

Evidence for Hypothesis 3: The geographic diffusion of officials with red names.

Evidence of Red Name Mobility at Individual Level

- ▶ Definition: An official is mobile if he works outside his birth province.
- ▶ Prefecture leaders with red names are more mobile
- ▶ Moreover, officials with red names are exported by province/year cohorts with more red names, and imported by province/year cohorts with less red names.
- ▶ President Xi Jinping is a good example. He has red name and was born in Beijing, a province with many red names, and worked as prefecture leaders in Fujian, a southern province with few red names.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Migration Indicator			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Party Boss vs Mayor		0.043** (0.018)	0.042** (0.018)	0.044** (0.018)
Red Name	0.070*** (0.025)	0.061*** (0.024)	0.057** (0.023)	0.034 (0.073)
Birth Province Red Name Share			2.767** (1.268)	2.325* (1.361)
Job Province Red Name Share			-1.275 (1.777)	-0.866 (1.831)
Birth Province Red Name Share * Red Name				2.189** (1.027)
Job Province Red Name Share * Red Name				-2.064** (1.031)
Constant	0.302*** (0.035)			
province dummies	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
birth-decade dummines	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Conclusion

- ▶ In the context of China, we measure parent political status with elite-style given names
 - ▶ this method may be useful in other contexts
- ▶ We find evidence that political power is hereditary in China.

THANK YOU!